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Psychological and Physical Well-Being of Breast Cancer  
Patients

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Melissa Figueiredo, M.S.  
Elizabeth Fries, Ph.D.

CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568

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## INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women in the United States and thus it is important to study the psychosocial impact of treating this disease and potential ways to improve women's quality of life during treatment. A large body of literature supports the health benefits associated with both written and oral disclosure of emotional traumas in healthy populations. However, no published studies have investigated the effects of writing about emotional topics in breast cancer patients. The proposed research is a controlled, randomized trial to test the effectiveness of two types of emotional disclosure interventions. One hundred fifty early stage, breast cancer patients will be randomly assigned to one of three conditions: cancer-specific disclosure, non-cancer related disclosure, or a control. During the intervention, participants will write on three occasions about either their deepest thoughts and feelings about their cancer diagnosis and treatment, their deepest thoughts and feelings about a non-cancer related traumatic event, or a superficial topic. Measures of physical and emotional well-being will be collected via telephone at baseline, one month, and six months following the intervention. Medical charts will be reviewed to collect information about date of diagnosis, stage of cancer, type of surgery, type of treatment, and duration of treatment. The results from this study have important implications for psychosocial care of breast cancer patients and may inform future interventions for improving women's health.

## BODY—ANNUAL SUMMARY

Preparations for the grant included the purchase of the SLIWC data program, set up of database, contact with nurses and physicians for referrals, and attendance at weekly breast health case conference meetings. Additionally, all surveys and data collection materials were organized and the randomization scheme was prepared. A 10-hour per week research assistant was hired and trained. Literature searches for future articles were conducted and relevant articles have been collected. James Shaw, MD, consultant for the grant trained Melissa Figueiredo on medical chart review. In September 1999, Ms. Figueiredo's dissertation faculty committee approved her dissertation proposal.

Patient recruitment began and data has been collected for enrolled patients. Other physician sites have been contacted as potential recruitment sites to boost accuracy. Patient recruitment was halted on December 18, 1999 due to Virginia Commonwealth University's research stoppage mandated by the FDA. The principal investigator informed Katherine Moore, MD of the work stoppage. The principal investigator submitted the research protocol to the WIRB for reapproval on Feb. 15, 2000 (earliest possible date protocols were accepted for submission). The protocol was reapproved on May 23, 2000. The principal investigator re-contacted sites for referrals and began approaching patients for recruitment. An intensive recruiting effort is anticipated and Ms. Figueiredo has submitted a request to Wayne Hoffman, DOD Contract Specialist, for permission to hire an additional research assistant.

Ms. Figueiredo meets with her advisor, Elizabeth Fries for one to two hours each week to discuss progress, ideas for manuscripts, and ideas for future research. She worked closely with her advisor on developing a proposal for a post-doctoral award for an NCI, SPORE breast cancer award in conjunction with multidisciplinary faculty at the Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University. In April 2000, Ms. Figueiredo attended the annual meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine where she was exposed to health psychology researchers and speakers on psychological distress in breast cancer patients (Jimmie Holland, MD, director of psychosocial services of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center).

In addition to the grant activities, the principal investigator participates in a variety of activities which enhance her pre-doctoral training. She attends the Massey Cancer center research seminars on Wednesdays from 12-1 pm. One of these research seminars entitled "Cancer Rehabilitation Research Initiatives" was presented by Mary Ann Dalzell, MSc, PHT, and Neil MacDonald, CM, MD of McGill University and the Clinical Research Institute of Montreal, respectively.

As part of her clinical practicum, Ms. Figueiredo receives inpatient and outpatient referrals from physicians, clinical nurse specialists, and genetic counselors. She provides supportive and problem-solving counseling before and after patient surgical procedures, and for outpatient chemotherapy or radiation patients. She refers patients to support groups and other resources as necessary and is available by page for emergencies and referrals to consult with genetic counselors and medical team to coordinate care. In addition, she co-leads a monthly support group for gynecological cancer patients at Stony Point Medical Center. She has also co-led a two-session prepared family caregiver course for cancer patients, family, and friends. In October 1999, she attended Psychosocial and Behavioral Oncology Conference in New York City as Massey Cancer Center Representative. A licensed clinical psychologist provides her weekly supervision.

As a member of the Massey Cancer Center Mind-Body task force, Ms. Figueiredo works with the committee to establish plans for integrating psychosocial services into the Massey Cancer Center and develop future research agenda.

She is an adjunct faculty and has taught undergraduate psychology of women and is a teaching assistant for psychopathology web based course for rehabilitation counseling department.

During the past academic year, Ms. Figueiredo received research funds (\$76) from Psych department to help defray the costs of a manuscript published in 1999, and she received the Outstanding Counseling Psychology Student of the Year 2000 Award.

## Appendix

### Key Research Accomplishments

- Training in chart review
- Research assistant hired and trained
- Accrual begins.
- Accrual restarted.

### Reportable Outcomes

Dissertation proposal September 1999

Submitted research proposal for Feb. 1 deadline for NCI SPORE breast cancer award.